

From: ereth
To: Microsoft ATR
Date: 1/23/02 10:55am
Subject: Microsoft Settlement

I am writing in response to the Proposed Final Judgement in the anti-trust case against Microsoft Corporation.

I am opposed to this judgement and feel that it does little, if anything, to deter the sorts of practices that Microsoft has used to maintain the monopoly it has obtained through anti-competitive practices.

By way of background I am currently a Systems Administrator who has began working with computers in college in 1977. I have worked on a variety of systems, both with and without Microsoft Operating Systems or applications, from micros to minis to mainframes.

One of the things the Proposed Final Judgement fails to address is the proprietary, undocumented file formats that Microsoft uses to hold a users data hostage. An office which creates all their documents in Word and Excel for a year, but decides to change operating systems or even applications, immediately discovers that those proprietary secret file formats are holding their data hostage. Microsoft file formats are notoriously difficult to reverse-engineer and no application currently shipping on any computing platform can reliably open and save to (without losing any features or formatting) a Microsoft file format, other than a Microsoft application. Companies with thousands of documents find they must continue to use Microsoft applications, at whatever price Microsoft chooses to charge, in order to have access to their own data. The alternative is to rekey everything, a tremendous burden both financially and in terms of productivity.

In fact, many purchases of Microsoft Office upgrades are forced on end users because someone they deal with sends them a file from a new version that their old version can't open.

Microsoft should be forced to make publicly available their file formats, and adhere to them. There is nothing special about a file format and it will not harm Microsoft to have these available, except in that it prevents vendor lock-in and people would have the freedom to choose their application based on price, performance and support. Adobe maintains it's position atop the graphics industry and the Photoshop file format and the Portable Document Format (PDF) are widely known and used in their competitors applications. In fact, the graphics industry uses almost exclusively open formats, so that files can be viewed and edited on any platform by any application.

